

Final Report: The Effects of Pet Ownership on Women's Experiences of Escaping Domestic  
Violence

SOWK 5405: Research and Evaluation in Social Work

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### Abstract

*Women escaping domestic violence are faced with a number of obstacles, particularly when they are pet owners. In partnership with the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS), our qualitative research study focused on the necessities of offering support services to women and their pets, the barriers that prevent women with pets from escaping domestic violence, and solutions to end such obstacles. As hypothesized, women with pets prolong leaving relationships where domestic violence is prevalent for fear of their pets safety, inadequate housing for their pets, and the loss of companionship. The vast majority of shelter workers identify the need for accessibility to a safe pet program in the Ottawa area so women who experience domestic violence have one less fear and loss in their lives. The effects of pet ownership on women escaping domestic violence are complex and play an important role in helping end violence against women.*

### INTRODUCTION

#### Research Question

What are the effects of pet ownership on women's experiences of escaping domestic violence?

#### Description of Research Project

Research was exploratory and attempted to identify the needs of women leaving abusive relationships, and accessing women's shelters who have nowhere to house their pets. Research was focused in the Ottawa area; and identified what some of the needs, barriers, and solutions are for women in this area escaping violence with pets.

To begin, a literature review was completed to provide a framework and perspective for investigation. Following, research took on the form of qualitative interviews, based upon two developed interview guides. Interviews were approximately forty-five minutes to one hour in

length. These interviews were directed at:

- (i) staff of women's shelters
  - a. to identify the perceived need, barriers and concerns of women fleeing violence with pets
- (ii) women who have fled domestic violence who have owned pets
  - a. to identify need, barriers and concerns, actions taken, and outcomes for women and pets

Interviews were conducted in person or by phone, as decided by the participants. Consent was two-fold; both written and verbal. Participants were recruited through contacting Ottawa area women's shelters:

- (i) Shelter administration were asked if it was feasible or possible for workers who have had direct and regular contact with women escaping violence to participate in this research
- (ii) Through the recruitment process, shelter workers were asked to recruit women who would like to participate in the research who were currently in direct contact with the shelter system, and who have had pets while escaping violence.

Desired outcomes included:

- (i) identifying the need for women with pets leaving violence in the Ottawa area
- (ii) to use research as basis for further research on domestic violence, i.e.,
  - a. potential further research on women with pets escaping violence, as well as potential other populations with pets escaping violence
  - b. potential further research on pet initiatives (feasibility and recommendations) available to persons escaping violence
- (iii) use by both agencies, OCTEVAW and CFHS
- (iv) use by student researchers to fulfill course requirement
  - a. use in final presentation and report

### Relevance to social work

The topic of domestic violence is relevant to social work in that social workers often work directly or indirectly with individuals who experience abuse. Cowles (2003) suggests that as social workers we understand and offer assistance to people by considering the conditions and resources of their current life situation. Social workers often become involved with vulnerable populations because of the challenges present in clients' lives, including lack of services and barriers to available services. In this study, owning a pet can be a significant barrier to women when attempting to leave an abusive situation. Women fear leaving their pet behind with their abuser because of threats to harm or kill the animal. Women also report they delayed leaving their abusive home life because of their fears regarding the treatment of their pet (Ascione, Weber, Thompson, Heath, Maruyama & Hayashi, 2007). It can be difficult to link clients to services if they have barriers present in their lives, which prevent them from connecting with support. As social workers we are not only responsible for working with vulnerable and marginalized individuals, but we are also responsible to advocate that services be implemented and barriers reduced for marginalized members of the community. Social workers are responsible to increase public awareness of social issues through research and education and to lobby the government for implementation of appropriate services.

### Research Definitions

*Shelter user:* A woman between 18 and 65 years of age, who has direct and recent contact within the last year with a shelter in the Ottawa area due to the experience of domestic violence, and owned a pet during the contact period.

Relevant literature offers similar definitions of shelter users. The researchers who produced these articles and research studies in our literature review, all conducted interviews with women who were currently living in shelters as well as women who have had a pet within a twelve month time frame (Ascione, 1998; Ascione, et al., 2007).

*Shelter worker:* A paid employee of an Ottawa area shelter who has direct and regular contact with shelter users in a supportive role, and was employed at the shelter for at least one year.

Some relevant literature identified shelter workers as those working within the shelter on a voluntary basis (Ascione, 1998; Ascione et al., 2007). However, limited our definition to a worker who is paid and has been working in the shelter for at least one year to ensure that the worker has had direct and regular contact with potential research participants, and is someone who has some degree of permanency at the shelter. This is important since we asked shelter workers to play a large part in participant recruitment.

*Pet:* Any domesticated animal such as dog, cat, rabbit, as well as caged pets.

This definition of 'pet' chosen by the researchers is supported by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2008). This source defines a pet as: "a domesticated animal kept for pleasure rather than utility" (Pet, 2008, para. 1). Also, relevant literature further supports this definition (Curnutt, 2001; Nibert, 2002; Volant, Johnson, Gullone, & Grahame, 2008).

*Ottawa Area: City limits and greater Ottawa area*

The official City of Ottawa website (2008) describes the City of Ottawa's boundaries as: "the amalgamation of the Region of Ottawa-Carleton and 11 local municipalities: Cumberland, Gloucester, Goulbourn, Kanata, Nepean, Osgoode, Ottawa, Rideau, Rockcliffe Park, Vanier, and West Carleton." Following, this is the definition of the Ottawa area utilized in our research. All shelters contacted from which research participants were recruited fell within these boundaries.

*Theoretical framework:*

The theoretical framework which guided this research project included two relevant theories.

These are the theories of harm reduction and structural social work. These theories are described as:

- Harm reduction:

"Harm reduction is an emerging prevention and practice model for helping professionals that views any positive change in undesired, problematic, or risky target behaviours as a successful outcome... The harm reduction approach seems ideally suited as a guide to practice in virtually all social work settings and reflects fundamental values and beliefs of the social work profession including the inherent worth and dignity of individuals, client self-determination, and the strengths perspective. In addition, harm reduction is applicable at the micro-, mezzo-, and macro levels of practice" (Bigler, 2005, p. 69).

- Structural social work:

"Based on socialist ideology, located within the radical social work camp, grounded in critical theory, and operating from a conflict view of society, structural social work views social problems as arising from a specific societal context... rather than from the failings of individuals. The essence of socialist ideology, radical social work, critical theory, and the conflict perspective is that inequality: (1) is a natural, inherent (i.e., structural) part of

capitalism; (2) falls along lines of class, gender, race, sexual orientation, age, ability, and geographical region; (3) excludes these groups from opportunities, meaningful participation in society, and a satisfactory quality of life; and (4) is self-perpetuating... [S]tructural social workers seek to change the social system and not the individuals who receive, through no fault of their own, the results of defective social arrangements. Thus, the goal of structural social work is twofold: (1) to alleviate the negative effects on people of an exploitative and alienating social order; and (2) to transform the conditions and social structures that cause these negative effects” (Mulally, 1997, p. 133).

Harm reduction is an important theoretical framework which guided this research project. This theory suggests that when a woman is escaping domestic violence, that if she did not have a place for her pet(s) to go, it might induce or increase the incidence of harm. This concept can be extended to include a reduction in the incidence of harm to her children and her pets from the abuser. Furthermore, the presence of a pet when a victim of domestic violence is in crisis and possibly suicidal, may prevent the victim from harming themselves, and workers can use the presence of a pet as a reason for hope for the future.

Structural social work is a relevant theoretical perspective because it determines that these barriers related to a woman escaping domestic violence with pets are within society and not the individual woman herself. Some of the structural barriers related to pet safety and escaping domestic violence are: safe housing, financial, transportation, alternate placements for the pet, shared custody of the pet by the victim and aggressor, by-laws and health regulations, and emotional loss and distress.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

To conduct our research we asked the question: ‘What are the effects of pet ownership on women's experiences of escaping domestic violence?’ We explored the common themes and patterns within the existing literature that describes the ways in which women with pets are affected when escaping domestic violence.

Studies of women with pets escaping domestic violence remain a developing area of research; therefore the literature is limited. Ascione, et al. (2007), agree that further research on this issue is needed. They state,

“Despite the potential significance of animal abuse in families experiencing domestic violence, few exploratory studies have specifically focused on this issue, making it difficult to estimate the prevalence of the problem” (p. 356).

We found that several of the articles employed a mixed methodology; mainly a quantitative methodology and embedded primarily in literature concerning children who abuse animals (Ascione, 1998; Ascione, 2005; Ascione, et al., 2007; Curie, 2006; Friedrich, Fisher, Acton, Berhner, Butler, Dawn, et al., 2001; Merz-Perez, Heide, & Silverman, 2001). The prevalence of this phenomenon is unclear, as is the rate of occurrence, and incidence. Most studies are centered in the United States and may not reflect Canada’s urban and rural reality. Many of these studies were conducted in the 1980’s and 1990’s and do not necessarily reflect the current laws on animal welfare in domestic violence situations, nor regional laws (Curnutt, 2001; Zilney & Zilney, 2005) on access to housing after leaving an abusive situation (Ascione, 2005).

By reviewing the literature on the effect of pet ownership on women escaping domestic violence, we have been able to identify four main themes that have frequently appeared in the literature: 1) The majority of women who have a pet(s), delay leaving an abusive relationship for fear that their pet(s) safety; 2) Women and their pet(s) are simultaneously abused; 3) A

considerable number of children who witness pet abuse react to the trauma by becoming the abuser of the pet(s); and 4) Pets are also part of the family and should be protected.

To expand on the four themes of women leaving abusive relationships, it is necessary to first discuss the reasons why many women with pets prolong leaving an abusive relationship. Although varying in numbers, the literature illustrates that a substantially high percentage of pets are harmed when women leave; thus, women are forced to witness the torture of their pet, which is possibly their only source of love, comfort and affection. Ascione (1998) estimates that “71% [of women] reported that their partner had threatened and/or actually hurt or killed one or more of their pets. Actual (as distinct from threatened) harm to pets represented the majority (57%) of reports” (p.1). Furthermore, of the articles we reviewed, dogs and cats were the most commonly described 'pet;' also, women often spoke of more than one pet (Ascione, 1998; Ascione, 2005; Ascione, et al., 2007; Curie, 2006; Friedrich, et al., 2001; Merz-Perez, et al., 2001).

Our first theme asserts that there is a correlation between women who fear pet abuse and women who prolong leaving an abusive relationship. The research suggests “that a substantial majority of women reported that their concern for their pets' welfare had prevented them from seeking shelter sooner than they did” (Ascione, et al., 2007, p. 365). Additionally this research is further supported by another study whereby: “A total of 33.3% of women (11 of 33), each living in some form of crisis accommodation at the time of interview, reported that they had delayed leaving their violent relationship because of concern for their pets welfare” (Volant, et al., 2008, p. 1288).

Our second theme claims that partners who abuse animals are much more likely to abuse women (Volant, et al., 2008). Some of the studies reported the statements of violent adult offenders on the etiology of their own abusive behaviour that began with or included animal

abuse (Merez-Perez, et al., 2001). Often times the pets of women who experience domestic violence become a bargaining tool to entice women to remain in the relationship. This concept is supported by the following statement:

“We know that cruelty to animals may be a battering partner's attempt at control, coercion, intimidation, retaliation, and an element of forced bestiality. However, we know little about battering victims' reactions to an interpretation of such events. If a woman has experienced animal maltreatment by her partner, under what circumstances does this further immobilize her, heightening her fear to leaving (especially when weapons have been used) and when does it prompt her to escape an abusive situation?” (Ascione, Weber, & Wood, 1997, p. 8).

The third common theme found in the literature, indicates that violence towards pets has a negative impact on children living in an abusive environment. It is prevalent in the literature that children who witness pet abuse most often become pet abusers themselves, which in turn ties into the cycle of abuse towards humans (Ascione, 2005; Ascione et al., 2007; Arluke, 2006). It should be noted that children in such homes are at heightened risk for being abused themselves. For,

“Witnessing parent and pet abuse may compromise children's psychological adjustment, increase their propensity for interpersonal violence (via observational learning and/or identification with the aggressor), and make children's cruelty to animals more likely to emerge as a symptom of distress” (Ascione, et. al., 1997, p. 3; Arluke, 2006; Curie, 2006; Friedrich, et al., 2001; Zilney & Zilney, 2005).

An amalgam of studies of children who abuse animals show that they abused to exhibit emotions, to release aggression, or to re-enact personal or witnessed abuse. Some of the problems with past studies were that it may have been the children, parent or legal caregiver self reporting or that checklists used to determine animal cruelty in children were behaviour checklists for conduct disorder and did not include questions related to domestic violence (Ascione, 2005; Curie, 2006; Zilney & Zilney, 2005). Furthermore interviews indicate that children who abuse pets mimic abusive adults by “re-enacting adults' power over children in

physical ways, and perhaps see animal abuse as a natural part of growing up” (Arluke, 2006, p. 80).

The literature suggests that the psychological effects of leaving pets behind when escaping violence on children may be more profound than the effects on adult women. For,

“Children must leave their place of residence, their neighbourhood, their peers and playmates, their schools and church communities, and to add further distress, they often have to leave their beloved pets behind who may have been one of their few remaining sources of nurturance and affections” (Ascione, 2005, p. 146).

The fourth theme indicates that most researchers who have studied this area are supportive of an animal fostering or safe pet program (Ascione, 2005; Munro, 2005; Nibert, 2002; Zilney & Zilney, 2005). The Wellington County Ontario study of Family and Children’s Services workers, resulted in a cause for concern for animal welfare and human welfare in 20 percent of the suspected abuse cases they looked at over 12 months (Zilney & Zilney, 2005). There is very little on the oppression of animals as part of the human family, in relation to domestic violence. For, “Just as groups of humans are devalued, other animals... are highly vulnerable in our society. The exploitation of other animals and the justification of their mistreatment not only closely resembles human oppression, but is inextricably tied to it” (Nibert, 2002, p.3).

Furthermore, the literature is virtually non-existent on the legal rights of domestic animals who live in violence (Ascione, 2005; Curnutt, 2001). There is a lack of information on the barriers for women reuniting with their pet after leaving an abusive relationship. Moreover, more information is needed regarding animals in no-kill shelters, which have been referred to in the literature as “warehouses of death” (Nibert, 2002, p. 240) where the animals are “prison inmates” (Arluke, 2007, p. 127). There are few statistics on the number of no kill shelters available to pets of women escaping domestic violence. Information about the health status of

pets leaving shelters (Arluke, 2006), and the veterinary costs when retrieving them, is also absent. In the US, there are an estimated 8-12 million animals in shelters yearly, and vague statistics for Canada, but we do not know how many are coming from domestic abuse situations (Adopt an Animal Canada, 2008; Yount, 2008).

Major gaps in the literature include studies of police reports that identify the number of animals that are rescued or abandoned during a domestic violence dispute (Ascione, 2005; Yount, 2008). Also the number of women who refused shelter as well as interviews with homeless women who do not seek shelter because they have pets (Munro, 2005), is not prevalent in the literature reviewed. There are no studies on the number of animals admitted to humane societies who are coming from a home where both woman and animal are abused (Curnutt, 2001). Statistics are lacking on the number of animals abandoned in shelters by women who have escaped violence, or on women who are afraid to claim the animal at a later time (Nibert, 2002). Finally, there is a lack of data as to whether shelters are opposed to some kind of programming for the animals of their clients. Furthermore, missing links in the literature include records of shelter workers, shelter users, and/or stakeholders who support the idea of a safe pet program.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sampling procedures:*

To answer our research question, we needed to identify participants who would be able to provide information regarding shelter users, or more specifically women who leave abuse and own a pet. Our research team decided to utilize purposive and convenience sampling.

Purposive sampling involves finding participants who fit the criteria for the participant, as described in the research project. This sampling technique is useful when the research is time limited as it allows researchers to target individuals who are able to provide quality information, thus minimizing time and effort on interviewing participants who cannot contribute to the research question (Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2006). In this case, our team was primarily interested in interviewing individuals who were able to offer quality information regarding the research question; what are the effects of pet ownership on women's experiences of escaping domestic violence?

We decided that two groups of individuals could potentially provide quality information regarding this topic; women who have left an abusive relationship and owned a pet, and the shelter workers who have had direct contact with these women. The women in particular have lived this experience and through their experiences, have become experts in this situation. Shelter workers also were able to provide useful information as they have been in some cases, a primary support to the women who have left abuse.

Our research sample was also a convenience sample in that we approached potential research participants who were easy to contact; for example, contacting shelter workers from a shelter list or by the shelter workers approaching women who fit the participant criteria.

Although purposive and convenience sampling techniques are useful in obtaining a sample when on a time budget, it must be noted that research results obtained from this type of sample are not representative of the greater population. This type of sampling will however be successful in obtaining the valuable information in personal narratives of the experience of leaving an abusive relationship with a pet.

Data collection method:

The Carleton research team called each of the approximately ten Ottawa Shelters and one drop-in centre for women, to notify them of this study. Furthermore, upon these agencies approval, they were sent an information package consisting of the project description, consent forms, and letters of recruitment for the shelter workers and the shelter users, along with self addressed stamped envelopes. At the time of the phone call we attempted to explain all of this information. We asked administrators if it would be feasible to interview a shelter worker. The shelter worker had to be someone who has been there for at least a year and who had direct regular contact with the clients.

Seven to ten days after the package was sent, the researchers re-contacted the shelters by telephone to see if these agencies had received the package, and to see if there were any interested participants. The research team called two more times (if necessary) in the 4 weeks following this confirmation call, in case participants had not been recruited yet, or they needed some time to think about whether they would like to participate.

The shelter users who were currently using the shelter or had been in the shelter in the past year and had a pet, were identified and recruited by the shelter workers. The shelter workers were also sent an oral script outlining the project, confidentiality, and risks of the project. After reading the oral script to the shelter user, the shelter worker then asked her if she was interested in participating. Shelter workers were instructed to give the shelter user the confidentiality agreement, as well as project proposal to review.

If shelter workers were interested, they could (a) send in a confidentiality agreement to Professor Karen Schwartz's office via the self addressed envelope and self identify when the

research team called back the shelters to see if there were potential participants, or (b) the shelter workers could also give consent verbally. When the research team called back the shelters, shelter users either gave their name or an alias to the shelter worker who was recruiting and/ or to the research team to indicate they were interested in participating. The shelter users could also send in a confidentiality agreement to Professor Karen Schwartz's office via the self addressed envelope, and /or agree verbally over the phone. Our goal was to recruit one worker and one woman participant from each of the shelters in the Ottawa area, to a maximum of 10 shelter workers and 10 women who had escaped violence with a pet.

After successful recruitment and confirmation of consent, we called the participant at the shelter to set up an interview. The participant was given the choice to have the interview done in person at the shelter or a location on Carleton campus, or to have the interview done via telephone. A date and time were set; the researchers allowing flexibility for research participants. Also, if there was any further clarification or information-sharing necessary, this was a good time to do that.

For telephone interviews, researchers called participants at the various shelters. Phone calls were made from Carleton or private numbers using \*67 (to block the phone number of the caller). Consent was re-confirmed verbally, and the process for withdrawing from the research was stated. If there were no other questions, the interview began.

There were two established interview guides: one for shelter workers, and one for women who had escaped domestic violence while owning pets. The interviews were qualitative, following these established interview guides. The interview guides provided specific questions, but as these were guides, they also allowed for the ability for further probing. Interviewers tried to capture the needs, concerns, actions taken, outcomes for women and pets, and barriers for

women escaping violence with pets. Interviews took approximately 45-minutes to 1-hour in length, with the researcher writing down the responses as the participant was answering.

*The method of analysis:*

The method of analysis for this research study was a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is described as a way to analyze research participants' 'talk' about their experiences (Aronson, 1994). Following, during the qualitative research process, ideas and patterns emerge. Thematic analysis in this research was therefore a useful tool, because this type of analysis "focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behavior" (Aronson, 1994).

The steps in thematic analysis are described by Aronson (1994):

*Step 1 – Data collection:* The first step in thematic analysis is to collect the data. In our case, data was collected through the use of semi-structured, open-ended qualitative interviews with shelter users and shelter workers.

*Step 2 – Emergence of patterns:* When analysing the collected data, patterns of experiences which emerge are listed. Aronson states that these patterns or themes, can come from direct quotes or paraphrasing common ideas (1994). In our case, patterns emerged in the responses participants made to our interview questions.

*Step 3 – Identification of relevant data:* The next step to a thematic analysis is to identify all data that relate to the already determined patterns. Again, in our case this was pulled from the responses to our interview questions. In the case of our research, we expected themes to perhaps fall along the lines of barriers and challenges; but there was potential for other emerging patterns.

Step 4 – *Expansion*: The identified patterns are then expanded on. All of the ‘talk’ that fits under the specific pattern, identified in the step above, is placed with the appropriate pattern (Aronson, 1994).

Step 5 – *Use of sub-themes*: The next step to a thematic analysis is to combine and catalogue related patterns into sub-themes. Aronson (1994) states:

“Themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs... Themes that emerge from the informants' stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience.”

In the case of our research, we expected themes to perhaps fall along the lines of barriers and challenges; but there was potential for other emerging patterns.

Step 6 – *Argument building*: The next step is to build a valid argument for the themes chosen. This is done by reviewing relevant literature. In our case, this constituted our initial literature review (as provided in this research proposal).

Step 7 – *Develop theme statements*: Once the themes have been collected and the literature has been studied, the next step is to formulate theme statements to develop a story line. Aronson states: “When the literature is interwoven with the findings, the story that the interviewer constructs is one that stands with merit” (1994).

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND SAMPLE**

For the purposes of the data analysis, both shelter workers and drop-in workers who were interviewed will be referred to as “shelter workers.” Likewise, “shelter user” refers to any

woman who had used the shelter or drop-in in the last year.

Sample:

There were a total of eight shelters and two drop-in centres who work with abused women, which were contacted for this study. The drop-in centres were added because of difficulty in contacting some of the shelters, as well as to acquire more diverse information. Of these, six shelters and one drop-in agreed to be interviewed. There was only one shelter worker interviewed from each of these sites. The average years worked for shelter workers were 10.5 years, with a range of 1-35 years. Three shelter users were contacted, but only one completed an interview. This shelter user had already left the shelter and was now re-housed. The two other shelter users did not complete the interview process because they had returned to their abusive partners. There was one shelter which openly refused to allow us to interview shelter users.

Data Analysis:

There were five shelter workers who knew women who had prolonged leaving abuse because of a pet. All six shelter workers and the shelter user thought that having a pet likely affected a woman's decision to leave domestic abuse. Five of the shelters said they did ask potential shelter users if they had a pet. The drop-in centre said that it had not remembered seeing a woman who had a pet or who had requested shelter for herself and a pet. All of the shelters and the drop-in, had official policies refusing entry for women with pets. The reasons

given for such policies were as follows: allergies, by laws, safety of animals and humans, cost, fear the animals would be left behind, culture, and capacity (see the Barriers section under Data Analysis by Themes, below).

Three of the seven shelter workers had never heard of Ottawa's Safe Pet Program. Only two had ever used the Pet Safe Program. Four used informal supports such as: kennels, friends, workers who took pets home with them, veterinarians, and so on. Three of the shelters made exceptions for small pets (i.e. hamsters) to remain in the shelter, or to have them on the property, but not in the building (i.e. dogs). Some shelters allowed women's pets to visit for a short period of time. Only one shelter allowed a woman with a guide animal to use part of their day service programming, but she was not allowed to reside there. All of the shelters and the drop-in said they had no policy, in regards to guide animals, but three said they would be open to accommodating a woman with a guide animal. Three shelters and the drop-in said that they were unsure if they would accept a woman with a guide animal.

The kinds of pets that participants mentioned needed safe housing and/ or who presented with their owners requesting safety were: hamsters, cats, dogs, horses, cows, and pot belly pigs. Two shelters mentioned discretely allowing hamsters inside. Four shelters mentioned dogs; two on the property, one for day services and one for short visits in the office area only. One shelter mentioned that rural women often need protection from neglect and abuse for their farm animals and that they are often considered as pets, such as horses, pigs and cows. The one shelter user who was interviewed experienced the death of her dog, who resided at a Quebec animal shelter while she was in an Ottawa shelter (see Data Analysis Themes: Barriers: Accessibility).

Sample Selection & Issues:

Study participants were selected using purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling involves directly approaching individuals who fit participant criteria, and convenience sampling involves contacting potential participants who are readily accessible, such as contacting the shelter workers directly and asking that they approach shelter users (Research Methods, 2006). The primary reasons for choosing this type of sampling are time limitations and the necessity of obtaining participants who have direct experience around the issue of leaving abuse with a pet. Selecting samples using this method ensures that all participants will have some knowledge around potential issues while leaving abuse with a pet, thus time spent on attending interviews was constructive.

The number and type of contacts made by the research team included 8 shelters (6 responses) and 2 drop-in centers (1 response). The final sample of participants included 6 shelter workers (1 rural & 5 urban) and 1 shelter user (urban). Pets mentioned during the interviews included hamsters, farm animals, cats and dogs, with the latter two being most popular. Two additional shelter users were willing to complete interviews; however they were no longer staying at the shelters when contacted for interviews. This speaks to the transiency of this population (women leaving abuse); with women returning to the abuse or finding alternative accommodations. It is possible that this is due to the difficulties in finding a place to house their pet, or else they return home fearful that their partner will harm their pet. In one case, access to women in the shelters was denied by a shelter worker; there was no reasoning provided for this. Lastly, an important factor in the sampling procedure was an inability to reach women who have yet to leave the abuse, or else, women who do leave abuse but do not access shelters for reasons

including pets. This is unfortunate as these women would likely provide crucial insight into the barriers that they are experiencing and that prevents them from leaving abuse with their pet.

*Issues with Data Collection and Analysis:*

Several problems occurred during the data collection. In early December we sent out the information packages to one drop-in and ten women shelters in the Ottawa region. As a result of addressing the packages to the shelter before obtaining a contact name, we found that some of our packages mysteriously disappeared, never got there, or got lost somewhere between arriving at the shelter and into the hands of someone interested in our project. This meant, in a few cases, we had to resend the packages with a contact name on the front of the envelope. In hindsight, when we contacted the shelters before sending the packages, we should have acquired a direct contact person. This would have made communicating much simpler.

Sending out the information packages in December without a contact name was also frustrating because of bad timing. Our fall semester was over which meant three of our group members left the province; leaving only two group members to make follow up phone calls after sending the packages. Phone bills were another problem we encountered; group members live out of town and had to contact the shelters quite often. The amount of phone calls made was due to the inability to leave a contact number with the shelter, as per ethics. In addition, sending out the packages in December meant we were often told that a supervisor or director was on vacation, therefore we should call back after the holidays. Therefore, because of not having a contact name, bad timing, and the inability to leave a contact number, we encountered a significant delay between sending out the packages and actually speaking to someone who could

make a decision about participating in our research project.

We also encountered difficulty getting a few people involved who did not initially see a need. This was not the case in most of our phone calls, but it is important to note that it did come up. When we finally had participants and our interviews organized and finished, we realized we should have practiced doing the interviews. Since this was a qualitative semi-structured interview we found it difficult to be prepared because of the structure and the possibility for probing. One solution could have been to be more prepared by doing mock interviews with each other, which would have given us a better sense of flow and clarity in regards to doing the interview process, probing and taking notes all at the same time. In addition, after we finished our interviews we realized we were missing some important questions. At the time we did not think about these questions and only later did we realize how beneficial they would have been to our research project.

## **DATA ANALYSIS BY THEMES**

Three grand themes were uncovered in the process of data analysis from the interviews. These were needs, barriers and solutions. Each of these themes was then broken down into small categories in an attempt to further define these grand themes. This discussion follows.

### **Themes:**

#### **Needs**

##### **General Needs**

The theme of general needs arose during the course of interviewing our participants. They did not specifically refer to a pet safe program but rather to structural needs that women's shelters, in the Ottawa area, are lacking. These needs may affect the capacity to create or sustain Pet Safe programming. For,

“Last year's stats-so 2007. We housed 96 women and 92 children. We turned away 951 people. In total, all of the Ottawa women's shelter had to turn away 3415, in 2007.”

It would appear that some women who are escaping domestic violence who own pets, may not even contact shelters. One possibility is that they may believe they will be refused. There are no laws to prevent cruelty and abuse to domestic animals, and most laws protecting animals have to do with illegal transport (Curnutt, 2001, Yount, 2008). Some of our quotes relate to this issue:

“I would say about half of the women I see have pet issues. Now outreach, some never come into the shelter – we’re rural – women are on hobby farms.”

Furthermore,

“For myself alone, I’ve had hundreds [number of women escaping violence past year], for the actual whole organization, I couldn’t tell you. In one quarter I’ve had over 100 clients.” Researcher: What is the approximate number of women with pets? “I saw a lot of them. At least half. I’d say 50%.”

Finally,

“We would ask [if women had pets]. They would usually tell us... ‘I have a dog... It’s with a friend... Can only stay there a week...’ ... [At] the humane society... [pets] can only stay there up to a week, if we write letters.”

Another need that arose was transport for women and their pets who were escaping domestic violence:

“When they call on the crisis line, if they are coming directly into the shelter from... the crisis line asks if they have pets, if they do, they are put into contact with me, agree to take pets, either with them, or I go get them.”

The staff feeling safe within the shelter, while working nights may also be an issue for some women’s shelters. One shelter worker thought having dogs around might serve as an early warning system in case of intruders.

“In my line of thinking, to have animals around...I’m thinking dogs, for safety reasons as well. I work by myself or 3 hours per night, and I’m the only staff member on. So for example if there was an intruder they’d [the dogs] would warn if there was an intruder.”

### Therapeutic Support

The next subtheme under our broad theme ‘Needs’ is therapeutic support. This theme refers to findings associated with women’s (and families’) need for support in situations of

violence, with the pets being able to fulfill this role for women and their children and families. This theme includes research findings which relate to isolation, trauma, suicide, grief and loss, support, companionship, vulnerability, animals as family members, nurturance and love, acceptance, judgment, powerlessness, and purpose.

Some of the research findings pointed to the tremendous sense of loss associated with losing a pet for women escaping domestic violence and their children. This sense of loss couples with grief and the isolation a woman may already be feeling or experiencing. Companionship, when in a vulnerable position is a tremendous form of therapeutic support. These concepts are highlighted in the response of one research participant. When asked if an animal has the ability of creating therapeutic support, one research participant stated:

“Absolutely, any child that has a pet that comes up over and over again. We do counselling with children. It’s a tremendous sense of loss. We will write letters to the animal and draw picture of the animal. And I find the sense of loss is more with a dog or a cat versus hamsters. For women who were often already isolated, the loss of companionship of the dog when they are in their most vulnerable position and in a crisis state is really unfortunate.”

These feelings of loss echoed throughout research responses. Research participants identified pets as being members of the family, and how losing a pet can add extra trauma to an already traumatic experience. This point is further substantiated by the suggestion that having a pet may prevent some individuals from committing suicide in the face of domestic violence:

“Their animals are their family. ... years of loss and trauma and then you lose your beloved companion... there's not a lot of incentive to turn their life around. ... having a pet stops some people from suicide... it's all they have to turn to.”

Furthermore, research found that not only can pets be considered companionship or support for women and their children, some research responses suggested that a pet may have

therapeutic qualities in teaching family members (i.e., children) to be gentle and nurturing after having witnessed or experienced abuse:

“And you have these children from an abusive situation watching the two most important people in their lives hurting each other and they have a dog around and it can teach them how to be gentle, nurturing and loving.”

Another finding which echoed throughout research was the position of the pet within the family. It was believed that pets could offer therapeutic support because often they were less considered as pets, and more often considered as supportive family members:

“People need to realize that women are staying in these relationships because of animals and that animals are considered family members. It’s like leaving your child behind.”

Pets were also considered therapeutic support as research responses suggested that pets were capable of offering unconditional acceptance and love to women who have fled domestic violence. When everything else in the women’s life seems conditional, transient, negative, and judgmental, a pet can offer the kind of unconditional acceptance and love that a woman may need or crave. This is no small task:

“To get that unconditional acceptance, when you have people who are so judged by society, and to get love and acceptance from a creature is huge.”

Finally, animals can offer women a sense of purpose in their struggle with violence in specific, and life in general. A pet may be the one thing which motivates a woman to ‘keep going on’ (below), and make the difference between loss and powerlessness, and motivation and support to continue:

“Losing that animal can be one more loss, one more sense of powerlessness... and can really make the difference to have a purpose; to keep going on or not.”

Findings from the literature support this research finding of pets as therapeutic support.

As highlighted earlier in the literature review, the following quote makes connection to some of the important concepts identified above. These are the sense of loss, the place of pets within families, the adverse effects on and for children, a sense of distress, and the ability of the pet to convey and teach nurturance and love:

“Children must leave their place of residence, their neighborhood, their peers and play mates, their schools, churches and communities, and to add further distress they often have to leave their beloved pets behind, pets who may have been one of their few remaining sources of nurturance and affection” (Ascione, 2005, p. 146).

### Formal Support

When participants were asked to consider formal supports needed to help women who have left abuse and needed housing for their pet, several issues were identified. Several participants stated that there needs to be an option available for women who are leaving the abuse, and the option should be accessible to the women. The following two quotes are from shelter workers:

“I do. I believe it (having a pet safe program) would give them an option if they can’t bring their pet. And the animal would be safe.”

Furthermore,

“They (the women) have to find alternate arrangements (to house the pet) and deal with the cost. Most of these women don’t have money. It’s a burden on their friends and family.”

When a shelter worker was asked if she thought a pet housing program would be useful to the women accessing the shelter, she replied:

“Yes and to the Ontario society for prevention of cruelty against animals ... and there was

a big plan a foot that they were going to make space in the humane society for animals, and I haven't heard anything more."

In this case the shelter worker was aware of ongoing discussions regarding creating a space for animals, however services never materialized. It was found that in addition to there being a lack of formal supports for housing pets of women who leave abuse, shelters have neglected to record information which can be used to demonstrate need for a service. For:

"No there are no questions about pets (on the intake form) because in our rules and regulations, pets are not allowed. We do tell them (the women) that the house rules are that no pets are allowed."

Participants recognized that there are additional challenges other than just housing animals. One participant advised that services of a veterinarian are needed in case an animal requires medical attention:

"I think they should have a vet onsite or a vet willing to take pets pro-bono in emergency situations. Or a paid vet on staff will to give some care pro-bono. The same vet should also be on call to provide care."

Another participant identified a discrepancy in the amount of time a woman can be housed in a shelter and the time housing is provided to a pet:

"We just have to get the veterinarians and kennels involved... more involved... housing the animals longer. It takes us an average of three months to get a woman housed... and there is nobody out there is that is holding the pets that long."

There is a lack of consistency in responding to animals in need of shelter and safe housing. However, it is possible to find a solution as there have been services provided intermittently in the past. For example, the National Canine Defence League in England in 1891 housed abused pets or pets of abused people. There were agencies to help refugees fleeing Nazi

Germany who had pets during the 1930's. A final example is the Hope Project, started in the 1990's in England to house pets of people who were evicted or who escaped domestic violence (Munro, 2005, p. 93).

## Barriers

### Structural

The structural framework of this research study identified a number of barriers for women and their pets escaping domestic violence. While workers at shelters may be open to the idea of housing a pet, by-law policies, cultural sensitivity, and allergies prevent women with pets from accessing their services. One worker in Ottawa described:

“Some cultures for example are not comfortable around animals and this would affect their ability to feel secure and safe in a shelter.”

Some shelter users also fear particular pets, such as dogs, which creates discrepancies between the need and the ability to find adequate housing. One shelter worker noted:

“At our shelter even though they [the women] have their own apartment, it's still considered, it's still got communal spaces, so safety is an issue. Some women are afraid of dogs and there are some dogs that will attack children. Yes for sure allergies. I am not sure about by-laws, what they are, but it could also be a reason. We don't them for the same reasons that landlord won't accept pets; because the damage to the apartment.”

This quote coincides with Ascione (2005) who also found that there are few studies that describe the intersection between housing, rental laws and animals. Furthermore, shelters are

often limited in space and financial resources for women, which make the matter of housing pets more complex. According to shelter workers in Ottawa:

“It would also be difficult to have pets in the shelter because of lack of space and it would be financially difficult to provide food and medical care for animals.”

Furthermore,

“We also do not have the finances to help pay to take care of the pets. What if they need veterinarian care because they have health issues. Or if the animal is sick the abuser might threaten the women that he won't pay for treatment if she does not come home.”

Moreover, women with disabilities who have pets, particularly service animals, are at increased risk when escaping domestic violence due to the lack of accessible shelters and by-laws refusing pets; therefore, it is crucial that shelters are able to offer adequate housing to women with service animals. When asked what would happen should women with a service animal attempt to access housing, one shelter identified:

“We don't have handicap accessibility at this shelter. So they [women with service animals] probably wouldn't come to our shelter to begin with.”

Women will prolong escaping domestic violence for fear of jeopardizing the safety of their pet. Many women who experience abuse in the home suffer the harsh realities of witnessing the abuse of their pets, which creates contingencies about their pets experiencing cruelty in a shelter or safe pet program.

“It's often when they call on the crisis line, it is the first thing that they will say...can't come in because I have animals. So that becomes an issue, a barrier to coming into a shelter.”

Furthermore, cruelty to animals should be referred to social agencies and police, as they need to keep tabs on the numbers of animals left homeless and make it public. As Ascione (2005) explains, “We need to preserve the instinct to rescue and the ethic of "do no harm" (Arluke, 2006, p.127).

### Accessibility and pet safety

Woman fear leaving their pets behind. They fear that they will be abused, neglected and/or killed. Furthermore, a safety issue arises if the woman tries to visit the pet or leaves abuse for a shelter and returns home to get the pet. Research indicates that 56% of persons perpetuating domestic violence have also abused animals, some of whom may have been the family pet (Merz, Perez, et al., 2001). For,

“Just as groups of humans are devalued, other animals...are highly vulnerable in our society. The exploitation of other animals and the justification of their mistreatment not only closely resembles human oppression, but are inextricably tied to it (Nibert, 2002, p. 3).

The woman may also fear that her pets might end up in an animal shelter and be mistreated, given away, or die there (Munro, 2005; Nibert, 2002). For,

“Abusers have actually killed pets in the past. And the threat of killing the pet is actually a big one. Risk factors for women who have a high risk of being murdered by their spouse... killing the pet really gives them a lot of points. And women, that I know, have left before and have come back and have found the animals killed... and they have returned to the abuse. Returned for whatever reason. That becomes the lesson learned.”

Furthermore,

“I know of the safe pet program and the humane society, but there is always a cost. The safe pet program might take a week or two to work. Also, the women cannot take the animals right away which creates a safety issue as they have to go back to the home to get their pet.”

The accessibility of the current Pet Safe Program came up several times during our interviews with participants. The current Pet Safe Program was only known to some of the shelter workers and the shelter user we spoke to. Many of these people had had previously negative experiences with some of the services, for example a humane society. This was echoed in the literature review where some animal shelters were described as “prisons” (Arluke, 2006) and “death houses” (Nibert, 2002). For:

“If I had known the outcome (upset, shaking voice) I probably wouldn’t have left. It was free and I didn’t know what was going to happen. I was phoning there all the time to see how my dog was and they said it was all fine. Then one day I got a call that I had to come right away and get her because she wasn’t well.” “They said I had to come and get her and that she was getting too stressed out. They phoned again the next day at 7 AM and said I had to come and get her right away. I went and I didn’t even recognize her [shaky voice]. I didn’t even recognize her. It was inhumane what they did to her. My girlfriend drove me there and other than the kennel she was in she didn’t recognize her either. She was half of her size, completely emaciated, completely dehydrated, completely emaciated and covered in her own feces and urine and blood. And they let her out and she tried to drink the bleach that was outside her cage. It was disgusting. I tried to take her to the animal hospital and they wouldn’t let me take her. And they wouldn’t let me. They said; “the vet is going to come, the vet is going to come”, and the vet never came. So they transported her to a vet and he was like, “why did they send her here, she is dying” and he was totally ignorant with me. They watched her get sick like that they left her in her own urine. I am sorry, it makes me really upset (mad)”.

Furthermore:

“..For “vets to keep a cat or dog in a cage for six months while someone tries to find shelter, I think the pet would suffer tremendously.”

Finally:

“Safe pet has a list of doctors... [I called them]... most people on the list haven’t even heard of Safe Pet!”

Many barriers to having an in house Pet Safe Program or trying to conduct one outside of the shelters themselves also arose. They included how safe the animal might be in the shelter

from other adults and children. The theme of the pet becoming a vehicle for abuse and venting frustration was in much of the literature on children (Arluke, 2006; Ascione, 2005) and with adults (Munro, 2005).

“What would we do if the woman’s behaviour toward the animal is not appropriate to the animal and do we then have a responsibility to protect the animals? How does that change how we support her? We talked about some of this [as a team]”.

*Pets as pawns/ prolonging leaving:*

This section of the paper refers to the third subtheme of the larger theme barriers. This subtheme is Pets as Pawns/prolonging leaving. This subtheme refers to responses which referred to abusers using pets to control a woman/keep her in an abusive situation or prevent her from fleeing abuse, and pet related reasons why women took longer to leave abusive situations. Items that came up under this subtheme include threatening to abuse the animal if the woman leaves, concurrent abuse of the woman/ her children and the animal, children not wanting to leave an animal behind, returning to abusive situations because of a threat from an abuser re: the pet, having nowhere to house a pet increases the likelihood of a woman returning to abuse, the pet creating a safety issue for woman and her children if abuser uses it as a pawn, wanting to protect the animals, can’t leave animal alone with abuser, harm to animal as a way of blaming the mother for leaving in regards to children, harm to animal as punishment for leaving.

Some research responses highlighted harming the pet as retaliation by the abuser for the women leaving the abusive situation. This is threatening to the woman. Compounding this issue further, the children oftentimes do not want to leave the animal behind:

“Environmental abuse... If the man is abusive to her, if he can’t get to her, he will go

after the animals as retaliation for leaving. And they know too... they threaten it. And the kids... The kids don't want to leave the animal behind".

Some women have prolonged leaving abuse because they do not have a safe place for their animal(s). Furthermore, some women never leave abuse because of an animal and other times an animal is used as tactic to keep a woman in an abusive relationship by an abuser.

Following, some responses also highlighted the concreteness of domestic violence, abuse of children, and abuse of pets:

Researcher: In your experience, have you worked with women who have prolonged leaving an abusive relationship for any reasons regarding their pets?

"Yup. Also worked with women whose abusers have done things... – thinking about a woman now... and the pets are the pawns. They are the things that are held hostage. He bought her a pot belly pig. And she loves it. And I had a conversation with her, 'does he think that you can't leave now because of the pot belly pig?' The kids are all grown and gone. Now the animals are being abused".

Not only can a pet prevent a woman from leaving an abusive situation or prolong her leaving, it may also be a reason to return to an abusive situation. Research responses highlighted how oftentimes women who have left abuse will return to the situation if they do not have an alternative safe place to house their pets. The women are worried about the well-being of their pet(s) and would like to check in on them. This also creates a safety issue for the woman:

"I do know that some women who have been here have returned to abusive situations because of the threat from the abuser. It definitely increases the chances of women returning. If not returning, to visit. This creates a safety issue because they woman wants to check in on their pets".

Some women did manage to acquire shelter for their animal. This however did not work out because of separation anxiety for the pet and woman. These alternative options are often not geographical close to where the woman is staying, and sometimes she is not allowed to visit the pet. This creates separation anxiety. This lack of shelter for pets coupled with the available

resources not allowing visitation may be a reason a woman returns to abuse with her pet:

“We did with one woman and had a kennel agree to house the dog for 14 days. In the end, it didn’t work out because of severe separation anxiety of the dog. After 2 days, she took the animal back and returned to her partner. She wasn’t prepared to leave the dog alone with him (the abusive partner) and wanted to protect him (the dog)”.

Blaming the mother for leaving is also accomplished through the pet. In some responses, abusers have done things to pets and then told the children involved in the situation that it was because of/ had to be done because the mother have left. This creates a troubling dynamic for the mother:

“There were some instances where with children involved and the dad had a dog or cat put to sleep. He had used it to blame the mother for leaving. So then the kids also would blame the mom for leaving and that he had put the dog down. Sometimes (the abusers) they use cats and dogs as pawns”.

Finally, the pet is used as a way to threaten or blackmail the woman back into an abusive situation:

“If the woman left without her animal, the abusive partner may use the animal as a way to threaten or blackmail the woman.”

These research findings correlate with findings from relevant literature. One study found that threat of harm to the animals and mistreatment of the animals, is one way children are psychologically harmed in domestic violence/ when a women tries to leave an abusive situation:

“...when pets are in a home, threats against them or their actual mistreatment can be one more vehicle by which a child is psychologically abused” (Ascione, 2005, p. 107).

Another interesting aside is that animal abuse often precedes domestic violence/ spousal abuse:

“...there is an amalgamate of studies on domestic violence from 1991, that shows nearly 34% of men and 9% of women who have witnessed animal abuse, will go on to abuse each other as spouses” (Ascione, 2005, p. 104).

Solutions:

Informal and formal supports already in place through shelters and drop-ins:

A few of the shelter had various ways of accommodating women with pets and farm animals. None had services onsite, but some were willing to overlook smaller animals or animals that were on the property, but outside. Interestingly, no one had a policy for guide animals. One drop in user, with a guide animal, was allowed to take the pet in for day services only. The cost of keeping pets is an issue, as is space and safety for the animals and humans. Some shelters are referring to local kennels, veterinarians and even pet spas. Others are receiving help from neighbours who have space on their farms. There was no information in the literature review concerning how shelters might be using formal or informal supports for women escaping domestic violence who have pets.

Researcher: But you do have a system in place?

“Well I have a list, compiled years ago, and virtually hasn’t changed, these people are very dedicated to our service. We use a pet resort in our area, and it’s wonderful. There are also a couple of vets in the area who will take our pets, or individuals would take our pets, and when push comes to shove, I will take a pet at home”.

“I don’t think that they expect us to be able to help them. They don’t expect that we would take their pets... they hear that it is something that we have already thought about... – surprised. And the cost factor... They can’t afford to house their pets. And when they hear about that, that helps... it opens some doors for them”.

“So every week we have a woman who comes with her Seeing Eye dog and there is an ex-resident who is afraid of it. This woman with the dog is not a resident, she just comes for the food bank and we do allow her to bring her dog inside”. [Researcher: So is this woman allowed to come into the food bank and talk with the staff and other users of the food bank?] “No, she’s welcome to stay and talk and visit [after getting her food]”.

“We have hamsters in the shelter. Two to be exact. It’s kind of against our policy, but we find that hamsters tend to be the kids’ pets and it’s already traumatic for the child to leave their animals”.

“There are 2 kennels we have used in our area. And we do have a list from the Safe Pet

Project of vets. And if we can't get anywhere within the first three calls we were asked to call the contact person at the Safe Pet Project to find a vet or foster parents [for the pet]".

"Hmmm. I want to tell you another story. A woman came to the shelter. Aware of service we could offer. Did have one of her dogs go to the pet spa. But had another dog who was older who had all the problems older adults can have. Bladder control. Also witnessed a lot of abuse. A lot of separation anxiety. Had been with this woman through a lot of this stuff. Couldn't leave the dog behind because of what they had been through. The dog was in her car. In her van. And she would go out and take it for walks. Now we don't generally allow that. But every single staff person closed their eyes to that. He was comfortable in the van. Woman was out there most of the time. Once again, I think you do what you do. That's what worked in this case. Know the rules, but know how to break them".

"The horse thing is really tricky though. I know the bond with women and horses. These are biiiiig [participant's emphasis] pets. Very problematic, even for me to figure out how to do that. Often it means me phoning up people I know who are involved with horses and asking them to help out. And that gets tricky too, because you have to be able to pull up the horse trailer".

### Future Directions:

Our interviews brought up many solutions that we feel are central for future directions.

Many shelter workers discussed the need for an animal shelter beside the women's shelter. For example one shelter worker said:

"Someone needs to build an animal shelter beside the women's shelter. This way women and children can visit their pets and everyone remains safe. The problem with this is cost and space. You would need to have someone take care of the animals. Also, have a big enough space to build an animals shelter."

Another shelter worker also acknowledges how space is a barrier. She comments on how pets are comforting and therefore a kennel should be built beside the shelter. This shelter workers states "it's proven that pets can be comforting and almost healing. If we had the space,

if we didn't have that barrier, we could build a kennel beside the shelter, but we don't have the space".

On the other hand, another shelter worker discussed the need to have a shelter that accepts pet. By this she meant that the pet would be able to stay in your room. It would, therefore, be a shelter for people with animals. A shelter worker explained this in detail:

"A shelter that accepts animals and you have to put your pet in your room. And there is a yard for the women and kids and a separate yard for the animals. It would just be a shelter for people with animals and so if you didn't like it you would go to another one. An emergency (shelter) one and a long term (shelter) one with the same kind of thing (referring back to a shelter just for people with animals)".

It is also important to get the community involved in providing support and space for women and their pets. To emphasize this solution a shelter worker said:

"We just have to get the veterinarians and kennels involved... more involved... housing the animals longer. It takes us an average of three months to get a woman housed... and there is nobody out there is that is holding the pets long".

It would be important to cut down on costs. Volunteers could work at the animal shelter and there could be donations for the animal food. It would be important to approach pet stores to see if they can donate food. This is emphasized in the following quote:

"They should have a boarding kennel, not an institution like the SPCA, more like a camp for dogs. To cut down on the costs you can have volunteers, donors for the animal food. You can talk to vets who will do pro-bono immunizations students doing this hours for co-op programs there".

Connecting with other organizations, who find foster parents for animals, would be a beneficial solution. This way the organizations can immediately take the pets and find foster parents. This is emphasized in the following quote: "find other fosters from other organizations

that would look after them long term.” Long term care is crucial to having a good program that can accommodate to the needs of women and their pets.

The solutions we gathered from our interviews connect to the literature. The quotes found in the interviews support the notion that animals are not treated properly because they are not provided with the proper care and support they need. Munro (2005) states how it is: “passive cruelty to animals to not provide housing” (p. 156). Munro discusses a ‘hope project’ in England who helps people who are evicted or escaping abuse find homes with and for their pets.

Human oppression is a topic that raises awareness for many people, however animal oppression is not something that is widely discussed. Nibert (2002) states:

“while many may have developed an awareness of human oppression through academic study, most...are silent on the oppression of other animals” (p.240).

In addition, although domestic violence is widely discussed, childhood reaction to the violence is something that needs to be directly investigated. Ascione (1998) states:

“cruelty to animals as a childhood reaction to exposure of domestic violence has not been directly explored” (p.76).

Animals are oppressed in many ways and unfortunately there is a lack of supports for them.

### **SHELTER WORKER COMMENTS:**

While doing the interviews we were able to obtain some valuable information from the shelter workers that cannot go unmentioned. Some shelter workers said they would bring up the

subject of having policies for guide dogs. This means that our research was not only an educational experience for the group, but one for the shelter workers. The interview raised awareness and insight making certain issues in need for discussion. In addition, many shelter workers voiced their concern for the need to have placements for pets, however they do not foresee any change due to current barriers. Furthermore, many solutions were offered, but unfortunately shelters lack the funds and time to accomplish them.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

There were several limitations encountered during the course of this research. The most important one was the lack of participants, particularly shelter users. Only one shelter worker and one shelter user from each shelter and drop –in were invited to participate. Furthermore, the shelter worker recruited the participant, and this may have been a barrier to obtaining more shelter user participants. For example, the shelter workers may not have worked in the shelter for very long and might not know all of the shelters users who would qualify for the study. The shelter workers may not have had time to contact potential shelter user participants. Our recruitment oral script (see Appendix 4) might not have been clear, and they might have not understood their role in recruitment. The shelter workers might have acted as gatekeepers, and been unwilling to involve shelter users for fear that participating in the research might trigger negative emotions and rehearsal of their abusive experiences. One shelter workers did in fact deny access to shelter users for this very reason. Our confidentiality statement (see Appendix 4) may not have been clear, despite making every effort to explain this over the telephone as well as in our information package. Finally, some shelters appointed a particular staff to participate in

the research because they were interested in the safety of pets. Therefore, our research lacked respondents who might have disagreed with a need for a Pet Safe Program. Our interview guides were also geared towards participants who saw a need for Pet Safe programming, and could have included questions for those who did not see a need. It would have been interesting to poll several shelter workers and users from each of these resources as to whether or not they were interested in the safety and well being of women's pets.

The research team had great difficulty contacting shelters and so the diversity of shelters was limited. We had received ethics approval just as the December break was beginning at school. Many shelters were experiencing changes in staffing because of the holidays and were likely busier than usual. Our team sent out packages and made telephone calls to invite participants, but then had a difficult time re-contacting the shelters. We were not allowed to give out a contact telephone number, and found this to be a significant barrier to communicating with potential participants. We did use our email addresses, but this was still not very personal. To preserve confidentiality, we did not go into shelters to recruit participants, although we did offer this option. We were not given contact information for shelters by OCTEVAW, and this would have helped greatly in securing interest in our study. Two nearby rural shelters were left out because they did not fit into the Ottawa area catchment. This research did not include youth shelters, where some women under 18 years old may have been interested in participating.

A third major problem in recruitment was that many shelters and drop-in centres said they had never seen a real need for a Pet Safe Program. None of the ten agencies contacted had ever taken statistics on the number of women seeking shelter or day services who also had a pet. None of the shelters have taken statistics on the number of women refused from their services because they had a pet. Only five out of the ten agencies even asked about pets during the intake process.

The shelter users are an extremely transient population, and this may have affected recruitment. Some women experiencing domestic violence, who have pets, may return to their abuser or move onto another shelter, even outside of the Ottawa catchment area we selected. They may not have been easy to re-contact. Shelter users may not have disclosed that they had pets, to the shelters at all. In two cases, shelter users returned home to her partner before we could interview them. Some women may never seek shelter, thinking they would be refused because they have a pet, or for other reasons. This research team is unsure how to contact these women.

Finally, all the members of this research team are animal lovers and this may have biased our interviews and analysis of the research. All of the members agreed that a Pet Safe Program would be beneficial for anyone seeking shelter, but not every researcher had the same concept of how that program would operate or be accessed.

## **STRENGTHS OF RESEARCH**

There are many inherent strengths in this research. The first strength of this research, is that a door has been opened into a relatively unexplored issue, that of women escaping domestic violence with pets, most especially in the Ottawa area. By undertaking exploratory research, this allowed for the opportunity to follow the data where it led, providing a thorough glimpse into this unexplored avenue.

Although there was only a small number of participants in this research project, we did manage to acquire rich data of the experiences and realities of fleeing domestic violence,

especially as framed by shelter workers. Major themes were identified from rich data responses. As well, many barriers were identified, outlining extensively some of the issues at hand. We were able to chronicle both rural and urban experiences, highlighting the specific need of the Ottawa area.

This research can be the basis or springboard for future research. We have outlined many possible future directions and it is hoped that future research opens the door for exploration of relevant issues; for example exploration of pet programs and housing, accessibility issues, as well as perhaps diverse other populations experiencing similar issues in regards to fleeing violence with pets. Furthermore, this can open the door for program development, evaluation, and improvement. Also, our discussion of future directions has included a key practical suggestion: namely, the development of a social work field placement which could begin in the near future and provide more resources to a prevalent and deserving issue.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, researchers were passionate about the issue at hand, which allowed for passionate qualitative research into an issue which undoubtedly deserves much more attention. It is hoped that this realization may lead to the funding, care and intellectual space needed to properly address, and properly respond to this issue of women escaping domestic violence with pets.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The consideration of future directions largely includes an extension in the research in several directions. The research would be strengthened with an increase in participation of

shelter users, or women who have left abuse with a pet. To increase participation of women the researchers would need to explore additional ways to connect with shelter users. Some possibilities include: posting information in the shelters describing the research study, one or more presentations to shelter users where opportunities are provided for questions, and meeting with shelter workers to increase their understanding and acceptance of the research study. Researchers should also explore the potential to incorporate participants in the study by requesting their participation in gathering information. By including participants as active members of the research, they may feel empowered, and a part of the research team as opposed to simply an informant. By including participants in information gathering, they may also provide useful information in ways to connect with women who have yet to leave the abuse. The ability to speak with women who are still living in the abusive situation, with their pet, may provide additional information regarding the barriers to leaving, as they have not yet been able to do so. Connections may be made with women who are still in the abusive situation through drop-in centers, postings in grocery stores, providing information through child protective services, and through personal connections with other women who have been in similar situations. The research must be extended beyond shelter users and shelter providers so that an inclusive description and understanding of the issue of housing pets is constructed. Research should include for example, homeless people, youth, and inclusion of males and females among all populations. Further research needs to be completed regarding the impact on children, of losing a pet through having to leave abuse with the parent. Children are vulnerable members of society who need to be considered in order to complete inclusive research. Lastly, it would potentially be helpful to extend the research to include organizations such as the humane society, to gain their perspective on the significance of the issue. For example, have they been involved in situations

where they have documented abuse towards an animal in a home where abuse has been reported against children or adults?

In addition to extending the research to include further participants, it may also be helpful to complete a review of other pet housing services that are currently operating. Gaining an understanding of successful pet housing organizations may provide useful advice to other organizations who wish to create a similar supportive service. By-laws around public housing and policies regarding the incorporation of animals in public spaces need to be understood so that any recommendations offered are realistic. Considering the difficulties in gaining support for non-profit development, some of the above discussed tasks might be completed by a bachelor of social work student, as a requirement for a fourth-year practicum opportunity (please see a brief description of tasks in Appendix 2).

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout this research paper we identified the overall needs of women leaving abusive relationships, accessing women's shelters who have nowhere to house their pets. We included an exploration of the challenges and barriers women face. Our paper began with a literature review to provide a framework/perspective for investigation. Additionally, we discussed harm reduction and structural social work as the theoretical framework guiding our research project. We explained how the topic of domestic violence is relevant to social work in that we often work directly or indirectly with individuals who experience abuse. Furthermore, we provided working definitions of shelter user, shelter worker, pet, and the Ottawa area. Moreover, we discussed two

qualitative interviews, who the interviews were directed at, recruitment, data collection and analysis, outcomes, and key themes which included quotes from the interviews to support our research. We also provided comments from the shelter workers, the limitations and strengths of our research project, solutions, and future directions.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Executive Summary	...	p. 50
Appendix 2 Placement Description	...	p. 52
Appendix 3 Quotes in Support of Themes	...	p. 53
Appendix 4 Ethics Proposal	...	p. 73

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**Carleton**  
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**Executive Summary**

From September 2009 until April 2009, five Master of Social Work students from Carleton University conducted a research study titled *The Effects of Pet Ownership on Women's Experiences of Escaping Domestic Violence*. In partnership with the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS), the qualitative research finds that there is a need to offer support services to women and their pets; that barriers prevent women with pets from escaping domestic violence; and that solutions are needed to abolish such obstacles. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven shelter workers and one shelter user from the Ottawa area. The following is a synopsis of the study.

**Thematic Findings from the Literature:**

- Women delay leaving abusive relationships for fear that their pet(s) may be harmed
- Abuse against women is simultaneous with pet abuse
- Children who witness pet abuse may become abusers
- Pets are important family members who also require protection

**Thematic Findings from the Researchers:**

- **Needs**
  - a. Therapeutic support – pets offer therapeutic support to women who have experienced loss and may prevent women contemplating suicide, from completing the act.
  - b. Formal support – women with pets need more community resources when escaping domestic violence (i.e. A structured safe pet program as well as support from vets and kennels).
- **Barriers**
  - a. Structural – by-laws (food and allergy policies), cultural sensitivity, and financial barriers prevent women with pets from accessing shelters.
  - b. Accessibility of safe pet program – financial costs and pet safety create structural barriers.
  - c. Pets as pawns – women delay leaving abuse because the abuser threatens to harm the pet if the woman leaves or has left and is not willing to return.
- **Solutions**
  - a. Formal/Informal Support – informal supports such as family members, friends, or shelter workers may care for pets.
  - b. Future Directions – On-site animal shelters, boarding kennels, foster care for pets as an alternative to caging.

**Ideas for Future Research:**

The limitations of this study were the complications finding participants, particularly because of gate keeping and working with a transient population. Furthermore, only one female survivor was interviewed in this study and seven shelter workers. A more comprehensive understanding of this issue is necessary in order to depict the larger population of persons who require shelter for themselves and their pets (i.e. male, youth, and homeless populations). Moreover, the vast majority of shelter workers interviewed identified the need for accessibility to a safe pet program in the Ottawa area so women who experience domestic violence have one less fear and loss in their lives. The effects of pet ownership on women escaping domestic violence are complex and play an important role in ending violence against women.

*Note: For further inquiries, please contact Karen Schwartz (research supervisor) at Karen\_schwartz@carleton.ca or (613) 520-2600 ex. 3514*

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Proposed 4<sup>th</sup> year BSW Practicum Description**

Our research team is proposing that given the lack of resources available for projects of this nature, that a 4<sup>th</sup> year Bachelor of Social Work student practicum be created to explore issues around availability of pet housing services for individuals leaving abuse in the Ottawa area.

The BSW student would be involved in creating a pet housing strategy including the following tasks:

- To compile a directory of pet housing services offered in the Ottawa area.
- To complete a review of services already being offered in Ottawa and by contacting service providers in cities to understand best practices.
- To research bylaws and shelter/ public housing issues, to better understand the challenges of on site services.
- To gather input from disability rights agencies to make shelters and drop-ins more accessible for guide animals.
- To contact veterinarians in the community to inquire about their interest in providing services to a non-profit pet housing project.
- To contact pet supply distributors to inquire about food and supply donations.
- To explore fundraising opportunities as a way to fund services.

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **DATA ANALYSIS BY THEMES:**

#### **Needs:**

##### **General needs:**

“In my line of thinking, to have animals around...I’m thinking dogs, for safety reasons as well. I work by myself or 3 hours per night, and I’m the only staff member on. So for example if there was an intruder they’d (the dogs) would warn if there was an intruder.”

“Last years stats-so 2007. We housed 96 women and 92 children. We turned away 951 people. In total all of the Ottawa women’s shelter had to turn away 3415, in 2007.”

“A feeling of grief and loss for the women and children.”

“For myself alone, I’ve had hundreds [number of women escaping violence past year], for the actual whole organization, I couldn’t tell you. In one quarter I’ve had over 100 clients.”  
 Researcher: What is the approximate number of women with pets? “I saw a lot of them. At least half. I’d say 50%.”

“We would ask [if women had pets]. They would usually tell us... ‘I have a dog... It’s with a friend... Can only stay there a week...’ ... The humane society... [pet] can only stay there up to a week, if we write letters.”

“I would say about half of the women I see have pet issues.”

“Now outreach... some never come into the shelter” (women don’t come to shelter because of pets).

“When they call on the crisis line, if they are coming directly into the shelter from... the crisis line asks if they have pets, if they do, they are put into contact with me, agree to take pets, either with them, or I go get them.”

“I would say about half of the women I see have pet issues. Now outreach, some never come into the shelter – we’re rural – women are on hobby farms.”

**Therapeutic Support:**

“Loosing that animal can be one more loss, one more sense of powerlessness...and can really make the difference to have a purpose; to keep going on or not.”

“Statistically it's not huge, but on a companion basis, it's huge.”

“The pet is their family and they don’t want to leave them behind.”

“I think they (pets) are extremely therapeutic. Animals will love you no matter what. And for a sense of security. They are calming and soothing. (Prompt)” “I am a dog person and I think they are amazing and complete the family.”

“Amazing for the children! My daughter is 4 and the dog is her best friend, and they have unconditional love and are a companion all the time.”

“And you have these children from an abusive situation watching the two most important people in their lives hurting each other and they have a dog around and it can teach them how to be gentle , nurturing and loving.”

“Workers in that kind of field, there is a high burnout and it’s stressful and at the end of the day it (the dog) calms you, like I said.”

“For women who were often already isolated, the loss of companionship of the dog when they are in their most vulnerable position and in a crisis state is really unfortunate.”

“It may ease the grief of the kids (having pets in the house), for the ones who had to say good bye (to their pets).”

“I would really like it. I would LOVE (her emphasis) to have animals around because I find them very therapeutic.”

“For women and children there is an emotional attachment to the animals too. When you are going through a traumatic even, potentially losing the animal just ads to it. In my opinion it’s very therapeutic to have an animal in a communal setting and could be beneficial to everyone.”

“Well lots of the ex residents and residents enjoy having the dog around. They like petting it. They love having it around.”

“I wanted to keep her collar and I couldn’t even go back to get the collar.”

“And we have had many kids who have had to leave their pets behind even if having a pet doesn’t prevent the mother from leaving. I don’t have the number of children who have had to leave their pets.”

“Absolutely, any child that has a pet that (the pet) comes up over and over again. We do counseling with children. It’s a tremendous sense of loss. We will write letters to the animal and draw picture of the animal. And I find the sense of loss is more with a dog or a cat versus hamsters. For women who were often already isolated, the loss of companionship of the dog when they are in their most vulnerable position and in a crisis state is really unfortunate.”

“It may ease the grief of the kids, for the ones who had to say good bye (to their pets) . It would mean having one less thing to lose. So not having to give up the animals, who is probably similar to a family member. It’s not like a belonging that you leave behind, like a picture or a toy. It’s not the same.”

“They (the woman and her child) both missed the pet terribly. I think it probably caused some depression for the woman.”

“So my daughter asked me about her (Bella the dog) and I explained that she is in heaven with Nonna and she is safe. And my daughter says why can’t we take a plane to go see her? (laughs) It’s hard to explain this to a kid.”

“Amazing for the children! My daughter is 4 and the dog is her best friend. And they have unconditional love and are a companion all the time.”

“I don’t really see any negative impacts (of having animals in shelters) unless it was (the animal) abused and you will have to watch for the safety of the children.”

“And you have these children from an abusive situation watching the 2 most important people in their lives hurting each other and they have a dog around and it can teach them how to be gentle, nurturing and loving.”

“And we have had many kids who have had to leave their pets behind even if having a pet doesn’t prevent the mother from leaving. I don’t have the number of children who have had to leave their pets.”

“Absolutely, any child that has a pet that (the pet) comes up over and over again.”

“The daughter was asking the mom about her pet. I don’t think it caused depression for the child, but she asked about “where is the dog” all the time.”

“If animals were allowed in shelters they might help women feel comfortable to speak to each other, it would be a conversational piece. This might help women feel less isolated in the shelters.”

“I believe that pets bring people a feeling of safety and security. Also can be therapeutic and help people bond together.”

“In an ideal world the woman would not have to leave and would not have to endure abuse. However if a woman had to leave it would take a lot of courage and support. Having her pet by her side would help her feel more secure and would help her emotionally.”

“the advantages would be the importance of physical touch...they[women]are often very alone in the world, and family is non-existent.”

“their animals are their family” “years of loss and trauma and then you lose your beloved companion...there's not a lot of incentive to turn their life around” “having a pet stops some people from suicide...it's all they have to turn to.”

“to get that unconditional acceptance, when you have people who are so judged by society, and to get love and acceptance from a creature is huge.”

“the positive impacts it would have on children. Women and children already have to give up enough. Having their pets around is comforting.”

“many women do not have children, only pets. These pets are everything to them.”

“It’s proven that pets can be comforting and almost healing. If we had the space, if we didn’t have that barrier, we could build a kennel on the shelter, but we don’t have the space.”

“We respect the animals, and it’s different” (Response in regards to advantages of accepting pets at shelter/services, in reference to Aboriginal culture).

“People need to realize that women are staying in these relationships because of animals and that animals are considered family members. It’s like leaving your child behind.”

“And the kids... The kids don’t want to leave the animal behind.”

“Also may speak to the isolation of living in the country and the need for a pet for women.”

“Well I think that in our culture pets have a have a position within a family. They are just a couple steps removed from children for some people. Especially for women who are alone and isolated.”

“Having said that, pets have been left and they have been adopted out. And there was one animal who had been put down, and it was a dog who was a fear biter, as a result of abuse. Actually tried to have him stay there [resort/vet] and it didn’t work out... I had the discussion with the woman, and lots of tears, and the dog had to be put down.”

“It’s often when they call on the crisis line, it is the first thing that they will say... I can’t come in because I have animals. So that becomes an issue, a barrier to coming into a shelter.”

“Separation anxiety, doesn’t just happen for the owner....”

“The horse thing is really tricky though. I know the bond with women and horses. These are biiiiig pets. Very problematic, even for me to figure out how to do that. Often it means me phoning up people I know who are involved with horses and asking them to help out. And that gets tricky too, because you have to be able to pull up the horse trailer.”

“Sometimes they sneak my dog into the back door. And when I know that nobody is allergic to her she is around. And she is a big hit... Women who absolutely love animals meet my dog. She always slept by the door of the building. And they just absolutely adored her. Brought her with a leash and if they wanted to walk my dog they could.”

“Hmmm. I want to tell you another story. A woman came to the shelter. Aware of service we could offer. Did have one of her dogs go to the pet spa. But had another dog who was older who had all the problems older adults can have. Bladder control. Also witnessed a lot of abuse. A lot of separation anxiety. Had been with this woman through a lot of this stuff. Couldn't leave the dog behind because of what they had been through. The dog was in her car. In her van. And she would go out and take it for walks. Now we don't generally allow that. But every single staff person closed their eyes to that. He was comfortable in the van. Woman was out there most of the time. Once again, I think you do what you do. That's what worked in this case. Know the rules, but know how to break them.”

### **Formal Supports:**

“We would definitely see this as a barrier (not being able to accommodate a guide dog) and we would work to eliminate it.”

“We never had a guide animal! I believe we would take the woman in and figure it out after. I have to write that down and we'll have to discuss it in a staff meeting. We would, I think take the pet and figure it out. We would definitely see this as a barrier and we would work to eliminate it.”

“No there are no questions about pets (on the intake form) because in our rules and regulations, pets are not allowed. We do tell them (the women) that the house rules are that no pets are allowed.”

“Then the SPCA offered to pay her vet bills, as if I was going to, they did this to her. I think everyone of those people should be fired! (missed a sentence) then I got a call from “A” (shelter worker) and she just told me I have \$430.00 vet bill, as if I am going to pay that.”

“They make these things for Muslims. Like I can't order pizza with pork on it. So I am sure they can make exceptions for animals (to stay in shelters).”

“I think they should have a vet onsite or a vet willing to take pets pro-bono in emergency situations. Or a paid vet on staff to give some care pro-bono. The same vet should also be on call to provide care.”

1. “I do. I believe it (having a pet safe program) would give them an option if they can’t bring their pet. And the animal would be safe.”

“Well for the animals to be with their owner and family is a huge thing. Animals go through as much separation anxiety as people do.”

“I remember getting a pamphlet for someone starting, or an organization (confusion)... that would house pets for women who area escaping abuse. I think it was an idea, but I don’t know of an actual organization. There is a group who wants to look at it but I don’t know if anything has materialized from that.”

“They have to find alternate arrangements (to house the pet) and deal with the cost. Most of these women don’t have money. It’s a burden on their friends and family.”

“If it was something shelters could budget, could put in their budget that would work. But right now, it’s up to the women. I’ve heard of women putting up lots of money to put a dog in a kennel.”

“I don’t know if we would accept guide animals) I think so, but I’m not really sure.”

“In a different shelter, like with an apartment in place like that it’s a great idea (to have pets allowed) .”

“Finding long term kennels or a place for their pet... because in the shelter we can’t have the animals... allergies... communal living... it wouldn’t work.”

“It’s proven that pets can be comforting and almost healing. If we had the space, if we didn’t have that barrier, we could build a kennel on the shelter, but we don’t have the space.”

“We just have to get the veterinarians and kennels involved... more involved... housing the animals longer. It takes us an average of three months to get a woman housed... and there is nobody out there is that is holding the pets that long.”

“Can get [some] funding... but it is an involved and lengthy process... support letters... justifying why we need the money.”

“That Safe Pet program needs to... they are doing their best... People need to realize that women are staying in these relationships because of animals and animals are considered family members. It’s like leaving your child behind.”

“There are some people out there [willing to help]. There are just not enough.”

“Housing that will allow them to have pets.”

“All fighting for the same pot of money” (In reference to programs and services all fighting for the same funding, and that nobody wins).

“We have 19 beds and we are ALWAYS at capacity.”

“We would ask [if women had pets]. They would usually tell us... ‘I have a dog... It’s with a friend... Can only stay there a week...’ ... The humane society... [pet] can only stay there up to a week, if we write letters.”

“Safe pet has a list of doctors... most people on the list haven’t even heard of Safe Pet!”

“If we had the space, if we didn’t have that barrier, we could build a kennel on the shelter, but we don’t have the space.”

“We don’t have handicap accessibility at this shelter. So they [women with service animals] probably wouldn’t come to our shelter to begin with” (in reference to women with service animals accessing shelter).

“Also, recently did renovations, and was discussed to put a little dog pound in, it was discussed, but it just didn’t happen. Space. We just don’t have the space... and liability.”

Researcher: Do you think a safe pet program would be useful to women accessing your shelter?

“Yes and the Ontario society for prevention of cruelty against animals ... and there was a big plan a foot that they were going to make space in the humane society for animals, and I haven’t heard anything more.”

“To access the 48 hour humane shelter.”

“We just have to get the veterinarians and kennels involved... more involved... housing the animals longer. It takes us an average of three months to get a woman housed... and there is nobody out there is that is holding the pets that long.”

### **Barriers:**

#### **Structural:**

“If a dog or animals chewed something” (listed 1<sup>st</sup>).

“Allergies. (Refers to a barrier to having pets in shelters.) I thought about it a lot when I was in the shelter and if I could propose something. I think a lot of animals might not have their shots and might now be properly taken care of. How would the shelter maintain that? I think the basic necessities need to be taken care of especially shots and I think the responsibility would fall on the shelter and so there will have to be some sort of funding for that.”

“Allergies. We are a 25 bed facility so we can never guarantee that we won’t have someone with allergies in the house” (listed as first reason for not taking pets in shelter).

“There is the cultural factor it is really diverse here. The touching of a dog is not sanctioned for some cultures. (Prompt) Muslim that I know of, not sure if there are others (I tell her the orthodox Hassidic Jews). So having a dog in the same living situations is not appropriate” (listed as 4<sup>th</sup>).

“...those (shelter users) with a fear of animals or who had a bad experience with an animal might be a problem.”

“We may have staff with a fear of animals. We’d have to incorporate that into our hiring practiced. The staff may have allergies, not feel safe, have a fear of them (animals) or had a bad experience with animals ( listed 2nd ).”

“...there is one ex-resident who was very fearful of the dog. She won’t even go in. sometimes we have to deliver the food to her. She’ll stand at the doorway and not even come in. I’ve even used my body as a shield, and she’ll stand behind me. I’ll be between her and the dog.”

1. “At our shelter even though they (the women) have their own apartment, it’s still considered, it’s still got communal spaces. So safety is an issue. Some women are afraid of dogs and there are some dogs that will attack children. Yes for sure allergies. I am not sure about bylaws, what they are, but it could also be a reason. We don’t take them for the same reasons that landlords won’t accept pets, because of damage to the apartment.”

“Well for staff if there was damage done, for example cat urine all over the apartment. The staff would have to deal with that when the woman moved out and we’d potentially have to pay for repairs.”

“I don’t know if we’d buy food for the dogs or where we’d put it. We buy food for the woman. Also what if the dog had behavioural issues or 2 dogs in the house at the same time and they didn’t get a long. How would we work that? (listed as 5<sup>th</sup>) vi. If a dog or animals chewed something “(listed 1<sup>st</sup>).

“It’s the woman’s responsibility, like anybody else, if someone can’t afford a pet. It’s their responsibility. We wouldn’t , the shelter wouldn’t’ pay for anything like that (referring to food and vet bills) .”

“It would also be difficult to have pets in the shelter because of a lack of space and it would be financially difficult to provide food and medical care for animals.”

“Some cultures for example are not comfortable around animals and this would affect their ability to feel secure and safe in a shelter.”

“Some people have allergies to animals and so having a pet at a shelter may cause a health issue for them.”

Women “lost housing and pets were taken by humane society” re. Mental health addictions recently “she found that the humane society had to put her cats up for adoption.”

“There's nothing more heartbreaking than getting a call from someone who needs shelter and can't take their dog.”

“Lodging. We wouldn't have the space for it even if we could do it. We cannot allow pets because of allergies. It is also a safety issue.”

“We also do not have the finances to help pay to take care of the pets. What if they need veterinarian care because they have health issues. Or if the animal is sick the abuser might threaten the woman that he won't pay for treatment is she does not come home.”

“All fighting for the same pot of money” (In reference to programs and services all fighting for the same funding, and that nobody wins).

“We have 19 beds and we are ALWAYS at capacity.”

“We would ask [if women had pets]. They would usually tell us... ‘I have a dog... It's with a friend... Can only stay there a week...’ ... The humane society... [pet] can only stay there up to a week, if we write letters.”

“Safe pet has a list of doctors... most people on the list haven't even heard of Safe Pet!”

“Finding long term kennels or a place for their pet... because in the shelter we can't have the animals... allergies... communal living... it wouldn't work.”

“Allergies... you would be surprised by how many allergies these women have... Fear too... some women are afraid of big dogs... And we are there to make them feel safe.”

“If we had the space, if we didn't have that barrier, we could build a kennel on the shelter, but we don't have the space.”

“There all traumatized at this point [the women]. It's adding more responsibility [accepting pets]... on top of their basic needs that we are trying to help them with.”

“Can get [some] funding... but it is an involved and lengthy process... support letters... justifying why we need the money.”

“We don’t have handicap accessibility at this shelter. So they [women with service animals] probably wouldn’t come to our shelter to begin with” (in reference to women with service animals accessing shelter).

“There are some people out there... there are just not enough... and housing that will allow them to have pets” (barriers being not enough people helping, not enough pet friendly housing).

Researcher: How long do they agree to house them?

“Depends on the time of year, the time of year I am most likely to end up with a pet at home, is Christmas time. People are going away and the pet resort is full. Most of the vets that help us out, also board during that time of year. We also have another step here, all this people also have other animals that are in there care, and I also have my own animals... need to know that these animals [coming in] have their shots... have a vet that will do this at cost. And also they have to sign a pet care release form.”

Reading pet care release form:

“I am at (shelter name)... I authorize... to take my pets... I authorize the volunteers taking care of my pets, to use or his or her discretion in caring for my pets... Release of responsibility form Lanark country house... Upon leaving Lanark county house I will take my pets with me... Women are financially responsible for vet bills... If I don’t collect pets... Pets will be surrendered to the humane society to be adopted out or humanely destroyed.”

“I think a place for their pet and the cost. Separation anxiety, doesn’t just happen for the owner....”

“Allergies... Allergies and safety.”

“Also a liability issue. What if it is an animal, and what if it did bite someone. If you manage to solve the allergy problem, then it becomes a liability problem.”

“Another problem for pets is culture. For example, in Muslim culture you wouldn’t have a dog inside. And we need to be available to ALL women. And sometimes other people have incredible fear of animals. And this has to be a safe place for all women.”

“Liability, allergies, and cultural. And safety, that’s a big one.”

“Having said that, pets have been left and they have been adopted out. And there was one animal who had been put down, and it was a dog who was a fear biter, as a result of abuse. Actually tried to have him stay there and it didn’t work out resort/vet... I had the discussion with the woman, and lots of tears, and the dog had to be put down.”

“It’s often when they call on the crisis line, it is the first thing that they will say... I can’t come in because I have animals. So that becomes an issue, a barrier to coming into a shelter.”

“I would say about half of the women I see have pet issues. Now outreach, some never come into the shelter – we’re rural – women are on hobby farms, and a horse is a really big pet. And a cow... who wants to take a cow? Because of farm issues women never come into the shelter. I see the pet issues, the farm issues are a different thing.”

“The horse thing is really tricky though. I know the bond with women and horses. These are biiiig pets. Very problematic, even for me to figure out how to do that. Often it means me phoning up people I know who are involved with horses and asking them to help out. And that gets tricky too, because you have to be able to pull up the horse trailer.”

### *Accessibility and Pet Safety:*

“I don’t want to generalize, but a child in the house may have experienced trauma and abuse so we can’t generalize their behaviors with the pet (refers to pet’s safety)” (Listed as 2<sup>nd</sup> in the reasons why they don’t accept animals in the house).

“The kennel asked if “she could pay, to pay what she could” (to keep her pet there while escaping domestic violence).

“No, never. They cannot bring an animal to a shelter. Finances. If they could afford a kennel I think they would. I would say money is an absolute barrier.”

“Finances, and the ability to... Having no option for the dog, especially if they don’t have a friend, family member or can’t afford a kennel.”

“There is no guarantee of the safety of the pet with strangers all around (if they were to be in the shelter) and we don’t know who the temperament of the animal will be with the residents either...(listed as third issue).”

“We would definitely see this as a barrier (not being able to accommodate a guide dog) and we would work to eliminate it.”

“You can’t take a pet to the shelter. I don’t know many who will take them, not even one that would allow pets. I have heard of them, I think in Europe, who will (take in animals).”

“If I had known the outcome (upset, shaking voice) I probably wouldn’t have left. It was free and I didn’t know what was going to happen. I was phoning there all the time to see how my dog was and they said it was all fine. Then one day I got a call that I had to come right away and get her because she wasn’t well.” “They said I had to come and get her and that she was getting too stressed out. They phoned again the next day at 7 AM and said I had to come and get her right away. I went and I didn’t even recognize her (shaky voice). I didn’t even recognize her. It was inhumane what they did to her. My girlfriend drove me there and other than the kennel she was in she didn’t recognize her either. She was half of her size, completely emaciated, completely dehydrated, completely emaciated and covered in her own feces and urine and blood. And they let her out and she tried to drink the bleach that was outside her cage. It was disgusting. I tried to take her to the animal hospital and they wouldn’t let me take her. And they wouldn’t let me. They said; “the vet is going to come, the vet is going to come”, and the vet never came. so they transported her to a vet and he was like “ why did they send her here, she is dying” and he was totally ignorant with me. “. They watched her get sick like that they left her in her own urine. I am sorry, it makes me really upset (mad).”

“Yeah. Safety for the pet and I had no where to put the pet” “. I left in December and she was there until February 1<sup>st</sup>.”

“Yeah. Safety for the pet and I had no where to put the pet. Her (the dog) behavior really changed. He was very aggressive and abusive with her. After one month. She would cower after he was near her.”

“They (pets) can sense the tension and stress and they will be stressed. If they have some where safe and they can be okay and not stressed and not get sick. Their owners could visit them every day or when they have time. I think you would have less animal strays.”

“I would be more worried about the dog (their safety in a shelter) frankly (than the safety of the humans).”

“We have gone back to retrieve any pets. (Prompt). There is a service offered to retrieve belongings (an acronym for the service I missed) and they go with police accompaniment to get the bare minimum- whatever they can carry. We would have probably organized around that. It’s called the Victims’ Assistance Support Services of Ottawa/. Carleton.”

“I don’t want to generalize, but a child in the house may have experienced trauma and abuse so we can’t generalize their behaviors with the pet (refers to pet’s safety)” (Listed as 2<sup>nd</sup> reason why they don’t accept animals in the house).

“The animals would get to meet a lot of safe people... ”.

“What would we do if the woman’s behavior toward the animal is not appropriate to the animal and do we then have a responsibility to protect the animals? How does that change how we support her? We talked about some of this (as a team)” (listed 4th ).

“...but what would happen if the woman left and the dog was still here/ we often talk about that. The shelter did talk about building a kennel at one point and discussed what we would do with the animal if the woman left without the animal” (listed 3<sup>rd</sup>).

“I knew that I was going into a shelter and was thinking I would have a place relatively quickly and I wanted to find a place fast. I wasn’t thinking long term ya know, and so I left her at the SPCA in Quebec because they said they would keep her for free, and she died there.”

“I have heard of some women having to give their pets away.”

for “vets to keep a cat or dog in a cage for six months while someone tries to find shelter, I think the pet would suffer tremendously.”

“I know of the safe pet program and the humane society, but there is always a cost. The safe pet program might take a week or two to work. Also, the women cannot take the animals right away which created a safety issue as they have to go back to the home to get their pet.”

“Most definitely, but it has flaws. It doesn’t seem very accessible and has loopholes. Problems with transportation.”

“Safe pet has a list of doctors... [I called them]... most people on the list haven’t even heard of Safe Pet!”

“At the last Safe Pet one [meeting]... adding [questions about pets] into all of the shelters questionnaires.”

“Everything but the ownership one. Pet abuse comes up the most” (response when asked the types of pet safety concerns women addressed: pet abuse or increased violence for pet? Accessibility or transportation? Financial barriers? A feeling of grief/loss for women and children? Issues of pet ownership between partners?).

“Pet abuse comes up the most” (as in issue for pet safety).

“We would ask [if women had pets]. They would usually tell us... ‘I have a dog... It’s with a friend... Can only stay there a week...’ ... The humane society... [pet] can only stay there up to a week, if we write letters.”

“We just have to get the veterinarians and kennels involved... more involved... housing the animals longer. It takes us an average of three months to get a woman housed... and there is nobody out there is that is holding the pets that long.”

“Can get [some] funding... but it is an involved and lengthy process... support letters... justifying why we need the money.”

“That Safe Pet program needs to... they are doing their best... People need to realize that women are staying in these relationships because of animals and animals are considered family members. It’s like leaving your child behind.”

“There are some people [who will help] out there. There are just not enough.”

“Housing that will allow them [women] to have pets.”

“Pet abuse comes up the most” (issues of pet safety when women leave).

“People need to realize that women are staying in these relationships longer because of animals and animals are considered family members. It’s like leaving your child behind.”

“Environmental abuse... If the man is abusive to her, if he can’t get to her, he will go after the animals as retaliation for leaving. And they know too... they threaten it. And the kids... The kids don’t want to leave the animal behind.”

Researcher: Have you worked with women who have prolonged leaving an abusive relationship because of pets?

“Yes.”

Researcher: Are women reluctant to leave abusive relationships for fear of their pet’s safety?

“Yes.”

“Abusers have actually killed the pets in the past. And the threat of killing the pet is actually a big one. Risk factors for women who have a high risk of being murdered by their spouse... killing the pet really gives them a lot of points. And women, that I know, have left before and have come back and have found the animals, killed... and they have returned to the abuse. Returned for whatever reason. That becomes the lesson learned.”

Researcher: As a shelter worker, might you suggest that women are reluctant to leave abusive relationships for fear of their pet’s safety?

“Yes.”

“One dog was a fear biter, as a result of abuse.”

“I think also, if you’re talking on the farm, even chores on the farm. The fear that the animals are not going to be looked after... food related or working animals.”

**Prolonging Leaving Abuse (pets as pawns):**

“I think that people wouldn’t hum and haw so much about leaving. They wouldn’t think of... ya know because you can just pack up and leave and not worry about where your pet is going (if there were resources for pets).”

“I don’t know anyone who has prolonged leaving, but you do know it’s a concern of where to put the pet. It’s definitely a factor in her decision to leave. She’ll think about where her pet will go.”

“If I had known the outcome (upset, shaking voice) I probably wouldn’t have left. It was free and I didn’t know what was going to happen.”

“There were some instances where with children involved and the dad had a dog or cat put to sleep. He had used it to blame the mother for leaving. So then the kids also would blame the mom for leaving and that he had put the dog down. Sometimes (the abusers) they use cats and dogs as pawns.”

“The partner had already gotten rid of her cat by releasing it into the neighborhood and she couldn’t find it.”

“They (the shelter users) are more worried about neglect of the pet than about abuse.”

“I brought her to the shelter and got a warning. I was ready to leave the shelter and stay in the car with the dog.”

“We did with one woman and had a kennel agree to house the dog for 14 days. In the end, it didn’t work out because of severe separation anxiety of the dog. After 2 days, she took the animal back and returned to her partner. She wasn’t prepared to leave the dog alone with him (the abusive partner) and wanted to protect him (the dog).”

“It would be difficult for women to leave their pets at home because it would be like leaving two relationships, making it emotionally even more difficult to leave.”

“If the woman left without her animal, the abusive partner may use the animal as a way to threaten or blackmail the woman.”

“The woman may also have a lot of guilt for leaving her pet behind, thus making it even more difficult to follow through.”

“I do know that some women who have been here have returned to abusive situations because of the threat from the abuser. It definitely increases the chances of women returning. If not returning, to visit. This creates a safety issue because they woman wants to check in on their pets.”

“Pet abuse comes up the most” (issues of pet safety when women leave).

“People need to realize that women are staying in these relationships longer because of animals and animals are considered family members. It’s like leaving your child behind.”

“Environmental abuse... If the man is abusive to her, if he can't get to her, he will go after the animals as retaliation for leaving. And they know too... they threaten it. And the kids... The kids don't want to leave the animal behind.”

Researcher: Have you worked with women who have prolonged leaving an abusive relationship because of pets?

“Yes.”

Researcher: Are women reluctant to leave abusive relationships for fear of their pet's safety?

“Yes.”

Researcher: In your experience, have you worked with women who have prolonged leaving an abusive relationship for any reasons regarding their pets?

“Yup. Also worked with women whose abusers have done things... – thinking about a woman now... and the pets are the pawns. They are the things that are held hostage. He bought her a pot belly pig. And she loves it. And I had a conversation with her, ‘does he think that you can't leave now because of the pot belly pig?’ The kids are all grown and gone. Now the animals are being abused.”

“Abusers have actually killed the pets in the past. And the threat of killing the pet is actually a big one. Risk factors for women who have a high risk of being murdered by their spouse... killing the pet really gives them a lot of points. And women, that I know, have left before and have come back and have found the animals, killed... and they have returned to the abuse. Returned for whatever reason. That becomes the lesson learned.”

Researcher: As a shelter worker, might you suggest that women are reluctant to leave abusive relationships for fear of their pet's safety?

“Yes.”

“Having said that, pets have been left and they have been adopted out. And there was one animal who had been put down, and it was a dog who was a fear biter, as a result of abuse. Actually tried to have him stay there and it didn't work out resort/vet... I had the discussion with the woman, and lots of tears, and the dog had to be put down.”

“I think also, if you're talking on the farm, even chores on the farm. The fear that the animals are not going to be looked after... food related or working animals.”

## **Solutions:**

### **Informal and Formal Supports already in place through Shelters and Drop-ins:**

“We have hamsters in the shelter. Two to be exact. It's kind of against our policy, but we find that hamsters tend to be the kids' pets and it's already traumatic for the child to leave their animals.”

“We have allowed one dog to be in the office a few times because the administration area is separate from the shelter. The staff also brings in our pets sometimes to show the kids (laughs) If we could have a shelter dog we probably would.”

“So every week we have a woman who comes with her seeing eye dog and there is an ex-resident who is afraid of it. This woman with the dog is not a resident, she just comes for the food bank and we do allow her to bring her dog inside”. “No, she’s welcome to stay and talk and visit (after getting her food).”

“We do run a food bank every Tuesday, ya know. So every week we have a woman who comes with her seeing eye dog and there an ex-resident who is afraid of it. This woman with the dog is not a resident, she just comes for the food bank and we do allow her to bring her dog inside.”

“The kennel was free of charge because we had (the shelter) contacted them previously (before this incident) to help out.”

“There are 2 kennels we have used in our area. And we do have a list from the Safe Pet Project of vets. And if we can’t get anywhere within the first three calls we were asked to call the contact person at the Safe Pet Project to find a vet or foster parents (for the pet).”

“Well we couldn’t have the pet at (name of shelter), so we tried to help her find alternative places for the pet to stay. We were able to, well actually it was a friend or I should say acquaintance of our Executive Director who had a private kennel. They did us a favor and the woman didn’t have to pay to have her pet stay there.”

“In regards to a study to do with the Safe Pet Project. There are 3 questions actually that they gave us and the Safe Pet Project asked us to put questions on our crisis line. So each woman who calls the Crisis line gets asked these 3 questions: (reads them off to me).

1. Is the presence of a pet influencing your decision to leave? and they gave us 4 options (of answers)
  - a. No, I have no pets
  - b. No it’s not a concern
  - c. Yes and it’s a barrier to leaving
  - d. Yes, but I have a friend who will take the pet or will put the pet in a kennel.

If the client answers 3. Then we will provide the names of vet clinics near them and if they come to the shelter, we support them in finding a place for the pet.”

“We would ask [if women had pets]. They would usually tell us... ‘I have a dog... It’s with a friend... Can only stay there a week...’ ... The humane society... [pet] can only stay there up to a week, if we write letters.”

“Safe pet has a list of doctors... most people on the list haven’t even heard of Safe Pet! The best case scenario is that the woman would be allowed to see the pet... Adoption program... house pets until women are stable” (in reflecting on the intention of safe pet, but not actual service).

“Safe Pet/humane society will hold them [the pets] for a week with support letters... involved and lengthy process... the Canadian Mental Health Association once paid for a private kennel for one woman....”

“We try to ask them to bring their pet to a friend’s. Almost have the pet couch surfing.”

“What generally happens when someone has a pet is that they call me” (referring to shelter worker who informally helps women with pets).

“When they call on the crisis line, if they are coming directly into the shelter from... the crisis line asks if they have pets, if they do, they are put into contact with me... agree to take pets, either with them, or I go get them.”

Researcher: So does your shelter accept pets?

“No, that’s why we need advance notice.”

Researcher. But you do have a system in place?

“Well I have a list, compiled years ago, and virtually hasn’t changed, these people are very dedicated to our service. We use a pet resort in our area, and it’s wonderful. There are also a couple of vets in the area who will take our pets, or individuals would take our pets, and when push comes to shove, I will take a pet at home.”

“I don’t think that they expect us to be able to help them. They don’t expect that we would take their pets... they hear that it is something that we have already thought about... – surprised. And the cost factor... They can’t afford to house their pets. And when they hear about that, that helps... it opens some doors for them.”

Researcher: Does your shelter or agency accept pets?

“No, but have a plan in place.”

“We have that in place. But don’t spread that around. [Other] shelters don’t do that. Women who had pets were being referred to us.”

“We do have something in place and it does work and it is necessary. I think that other shelters need to get their act together.”

“I don’t know what we would do if it was an issue, I guess we would have to really think about it” (allergies or other barrier and service animal at same time).

“You do what you do in the moment, problem solve as you go along. Do what’s necessary.”

“There is always an answer, sometimes you just have to look a little longer.”

“It is always the first choice, if they think they could go with a friend and be safe.”

“Also, recently did renovations, and was discussed to put a little dog pound in, it was discussed, but it just didn’t happen. Space. We just don’t have the space... and liability.”

Researcher: Do you think a safe pet program would be useful to women accessing your shelter?  
 “Yes and the Ontario society for prevention of cruelty against animals and Lanark county... and there was a big plan a foot that they were going to make space in the humane society for animals, and I haven’t heard anything more.”

“The horse thing is really tricky though. I know the bond with women and horses. These are biiiig pets. Very problematic, even for me to figure out how to do that. Often it means me phoning up people I know who are involved with horses and asking them to help out. And that gets tricky too, because you have to be able to pull up the horse trailer.”

“Hmmm. I want to tell you another story. A woman came to the shelter. Aware of service we could offer. Did have one of her dogs go to the pet spa. But had another dog who was older who had all the problems older adults can have. Bladder control. Also witnessed a lot of abuse. A lot of separation anxiety. Had been with this woman through a lot of this stuff. Couldn’t leave the dog behind because of what they had been through. The dog was in her car. In her van. And she would go out and take it for walks. Now we don’t generally allow that. But every single staff person closed there eyes to that. He was comfortable in the van. Woman was out there most of the time. Once again, I think you do what you do. That’s what worked in this case. Know the rules, but know how to break them.”

### **Future Directions:**

“Find other fosters from other organizations that would look after them long term.”

“The shelter did talk about building a kennel at one point....”

“I think if we did it we would have to have a separate structure and not in the house. We discuss whether to have animals in the shelter a lot, but it never goes past” we wish we had them in the shelter”. “I know when they were building this place, they were planning to build a kennel 4 years ago and were looking at it but thought it wasn’t viable” (listed 4<sup>th</sup>).

“I have two ideas.

- a. The first one is a shelter that accepts animals and you have to put your pet in your room. And there is a yard for the women and kids and a separate yard for the animals. It would just be a shelter for people with animals and so if you didn’t like it you would go to another one. An emergency (shelter) one and a long term (shelter) one with the same kind of thing (referring back to a shelter just for people with animals).
- b. For people who, the reality of emergency shelters is not going to happen. They should have a boarding kennel, not an institution like the SPCA, more like a camp for dogs. To cut down on the costs you can have volunteer, donors for the animal food. You can talk to vets who will do pro- bono immunizations students doing their hours for co-op (programs) there.”

“Families (using the shelter) should have to donate their time to the doggy centres, a mandatory number of hours per well.”

“I think foster parents” are what's needed for a pet program...not cages.”

“Someone needs to build an animal shelter beside the women’s shelter. This way women and children can visit their pets and everyone remains safe. The problem with this is cost and space. You would need to have someone take care of the animals. Also, have a big enough space to build an animal shelter.”

“Finding long term kennels or a place for their pet... because in the shelter we can’t have the animals... allergies... communal living... it wouldn’t work.”

“It’s proven that pets can be comforting and almost healing. If we had the space, if we didn’t have that barrier, we could build a kennel on the shelter, but we don’t have the space.”

“We just have to get the veterinarians and kennels involved... more involved... housing the animals longer. It takes us an average of three months to get a woman housed... and there is nobody out there is that is holding the pets that long.”

“Can get [some] funding... but it is an involved and lengthy process... support letters... justifying why we need the money.”

“That Safe Pet program needs to... they are doing their best... People need to realize that women are staying in these relationships because of animals and animals are considered family members. It’s like leaving your child behind.”

“There are some people out there [willing to help]. There are just not enough.”

“Housing that will allow them to have pets.”

“Also, recently did renovations, and was discussed to put a little dog pound in, it was discussed, but it just didn’t happen. Space. We just don’t have the space... and liability.”

Researcher: Do you think a safe pet program would be useful to women accessing your shelter?

“Yes and the Ontario society for prevention of cruelty against animals and Lanark county... and there was a big plan a foot that they were going to make space in the humane society for animals, and I haven’t heard anything more.”

“Accommodate the animal and accommodate the women.”